



February 28, 2013

Honorable Co-Chairs Representative Willis and Senator Bye,  
Honorable Vice Chairs Representative Haddad and Senator Cassano,  
Ranking Members Representative LeGeyt and Senator Boucher,  
and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

We, the Student Senate of Northwestern Connecticut Community College, representing the students of the institution, would like to express our concern over a specific change to financial aid distribution stated by Governor's Bill No. 844. The purpose of this letter is to briefly explain the nature of the change; the manner in which it will affect community college students; and to propose possible amendments to the bill allowing it to more adequately provide for the needs of our students.

Section 14 (b) of Bill No. 844 establishes "the Governor's Scholarship program" for distributing need and merit based grants to students. This program will replace existing grant and scholarship programs including the CAPCS grant program (Connecticut Aid to Public College Students), which is of particular importance to community college students. Where grants awarded under the CAPCS program were available to all academically qualified students, grants awarded under the Governor's Scholarship program will be restricted to first-time, full-time students only. The bill also does not provide opportunity for student employment, which has been shown to result in higher graduation rates and avoidance of student loan debt.

Our specific concerns are that the majority of those attending community colleges cannot be described as first-time, full-time students and that the bill, as written, will eliminate state grants for the majority of community college students. Most of our students attend college part-time while simultaneously holding jobs; many also caring for families. Funds from state sponsored grants allow many of these students to reduce their work hours and focus on succeeding in their academic efforts. Of the 10,674 community college students who received a CAPCS grant in the 2011-2012 academic year, 65% were part-time students. Eliminating the grants and work opportunities these students rely upon will result in decreased college enrollment, increased student loan debt, and less overall academic success within the community college system. Among our Northwestern students receiving state grants, the number of returning or part-time students dwarfs those who fit the first-time, full-time description. Only 25.8% of our students who have been awarded a CAPCS grant will qualify to receive a grant under the Governor's Scholarship program. The effect on these students will be quite drastic.

We propose the bill be amended as follows: As it stands the requirement, in section 14 subsections (d) and (e) of the bill, states that those awarded grants under the Governor's Scholarship program be first-time, full-time students.

1. Replace "first-time, full-time students" with "students receiving their first undergraduate degree"
2. Authorize that colleges be able to use a percentage of allocated grant funds for student employment

We give our sincere thanks to you for taking the time to review our concerns and hope that you will take our requests into consideration in the process of moving the bill forward. We believe the proposed changes will result in a higher percentage of community college students completing their degree and certificate programs.

Respectfully,

Danielle Balducci  
Student Senate President

Ethan Napolitano  
Club Council President